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SIPDIS

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TAGS: IS KPAL PREL XF GOI INTERNAL ISRAELI PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS
SUBJECT: (S) ISRAELI READOUT ON MUBARAK-MOFAZ MEETING IN SHARM EL-SHEIK

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) BG Eitan Dangott, Military Secretary of Defense Minister Mofaz, briefed the Ambassador March 11 on the meeting held the previous day in Sharm between Mofaz and Egyptian President Mubarak, with the participation of Defense Minister Tantawi and Intelligence Chief Sulayman. Dangott said the atmosphere and substance of the extended meetings were excellent, and progress was achieved on all issues.

Palestinian Issues

¶2. (S) Dangott said that Mofaz briefed Mubarak on the responsibility of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), based in Damascus, for the February 25 terror attack in Tel Aviv. Mofaz also told Mubarak that PIJ has been trying incessantly to organize additional acts of terrorism. In the last 24 hours, Israeli security forces rounded up a group of 8 PIJ terrorists who were in the final planning phase of a suicide bombing.

¶3. (S) Mofaz also briefed Mubarak on the steps Israel is taking to ease Palestinian living conditions and fulfill the understandings reached at the Sharm el-Sheik summit. For example, the number of Palestinian workers entering Israel has been increasing almost daily and has almost reached the target of 35,000 per day. In response to specific requests from President Abbas, Mofaz had agreed to release a significant number of Palestinian vehicles, to expand the list of VIP travel, to increase the number of businessmen who can travel daily to Israel, and to give priority to family reunification issues between Gaza and the West Bank. The prisoners committee will meet on Monday to start working on the next release of 400 prisoners. And Mofaz had agreed that 41 of the 49 Palestinians deported from Bethlehem to Gaza after the Church of the Nativity takeover would be permitted to return to Bethlehem. Dangott noted that Abbas was unhappy that 8 of the deportees would not be permitted to return, but Mofaz had told Abbas that these 8 had "blood on their hands" and would not be permitted to go to Bethlehem at this time.

¶4. (S) Dangott said Mofaz had also brought Mubarak up to date on the status of the Palestinian-Israeli security negotiations (septel). Mofaz asked Mubarak's help in persuading Abbas to authorize his negotiators to conclude a deal soon on the transfer of security in Jericho and Tulkarm.

Egypt-Israel Issues

¶5. (S) Dangott said Mofaz and Mubarak had "solved" all the problems related to the deployment of 750 Egyptian border guards to the Egypt-Gaza border. Military teams would meet over the next few weeks to work up a detailed agreement, which would be signed by generals from the two sides. Dangott specified that all of the issues on which the two sides had previously been divided were now agreed, including the type of arms and vehicles, the method for bilateral evaluation of the deployment, and the authorization of commanders in the field to liaise and coordinate directly.

¶6. (S) Mofaz raised the need for Egypt to deal comprehensively with the issue of smuggling into Gaza by stemming the flow of weapons even before they reach the Gaza border. Mubarak said that weapons smuggling is a threat to him and the Egyptian regime and said that both Israel and Egypt need to do a better job in confronting this problem. Mofaz also briefed Mubarak on the issue of tunnels under the Philadelphi strip. Dangott said that Mubarak appeared unaware of the magnitude and sophistication of the tunnel problem. Mofaz also provided to Tantawi the name of the person the Israelis believe is one of the master smugglers in Sinai.

¶7. (S) Dangott said that substantial progress was also registered on a number of military-military issues, including:

-- Mubarak agreed on cooperation between the Egyptian and Israeli military on terrorism, specifically relating to intelligence sharing on terrorism matters.

-- Mubarak agreed that Egypt and Israel should plan and hold a search and rescue exercise relating to humanitarian issues. Dangott said the impetus for this was the uncoordinated response to the terror attack in Taba.

-- Mubarak reportedly said that air and sea cooperation could improve over time, but he said he needed first to "prepare" the Egyptian population.

-- A hotline will be established between the two Ministries of Defense.

-- Egypt has agreed to facilitate additional searches for Israeli missing in action in Sinai and Egypt.

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